

Message Text

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ACTION CU-03

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OEXC, SY

SUBJ: BENNY CARTER AMERICAN JAZZ QUINTET

1. SUMMARY: BENNY CARTER'S PROGRAM IN SYRIA WAS MIXED BLESSING: IT BROUGHT AMERICAN MUSIC OF VERY HIGHEST QUALITY TO AN APPRECIATIVE SYRIAN PUBLIC; IT LEFT THE EMBASSY WITH WORST RELATIONS WITH SYRIAN OFFICIALS INVOLVED WITH CULTURAL EXCHANGE SINCE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS. PROBLEMS CAUSED BY ALEPPO CANCELLATION ARE SERIOUS, AND PERHAPS BLOWN OUT OF PROPORTION BY CURRENT SARG UNHAPPINESS OVER US ROLE IN AREA PEACE EFFORTS. SPECIAL EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE SOON TO BRING HIGH LEVEL CULTURAL PRESENTATION TO SYRIA TO HELP RESTORE RELATIONS WITH MINCULTURE AND ALEPPO UNIVERSITY. END SUMMARY.

2. CARTER GROUP ARRIVED JANUARY 8 AS SCHEDULED WITH GROUP COMPLAINING OF EXHAUSTION AND VARIOUS AILMENTS. BENNY CARTER IN PARTICULAR SUFFERING FROM HEAVY COLD AND BODY PAINS, WHICH LATER DIAGNOSED AS MILD PLEURISY. ON ADVICE OF LOCAL PHYSICIAN CARTER TOOK TO BED FOR MINIMUM 24 HOURS, MEANING HE COULD NOT APPEAR AT AMBASSADOR'S RECEPTION JANUARY 8 OR TRAVEL TO ALEPPO FOR JANUARY 9 PERFORMANCE. EMBASSY ENDEAVORED PERSUADE BALANCE OF GROUP TO PROCEED TO ALEPPO WITHOUT CARTER. GROUP DIVIDED IN REACTIOON THIS PROPOSAL, BUT EVENTUALLY DECIDED NOT TO GO.

3. EMBASSY INFORMED ALEPPO OFFICIALS OF CANCELLATION EARLY JAN 9, BUT WORD APPARENTLY DID NOT REACH MANY OF INVITED
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GUESTS WHO APPEARED LATER EXPECTING PERFORMANCE. CANCELLATION

RESULTED IN FLOOD OF TELEPHONE CALLS TO MINCULTURE DAMASCUS FROM VARIOUS ALEPPO OFFICIALS, INCLUDING UNIVERSITY RECTOR WHO MEMBER BAATH REGIONAL COMMAND. MINISTRY, FURIOUS OVER CANCELLATION ALEPPO, THREATENED CANCEL DAMASCUS CONCERT AS WELL. INSTEAD, CONCERT IN DAMASCUS WENT ON BUT NO MINCULTURE OFFICIALS ATTENDED PERFORMANCE.

4. ARTISTICALLY, DAMASCUS CONCERT A GREAT SUCCESS. PACKED AUDITORIUM GAVE GROUP VERY WARM RECEPTION. PERFORMANCE STILL TALK OF DAMASCUS. MEDIA COVERAGE OF PERFORMANCE AND INDIVIDUAL GROUP MEMBERS HEAVIEST OF ANY PRESENTATION SINCE RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS.

5. EMBASSY BELIEVES LABORIOUS EFFORTS IN CULTURAL FIELD JEOPARDIZED OVER ALEPPO CANCELLATION. DEPMINCULTURE HAD STRESSED ALEPPO CO-EQUAL IN IMPORTANCE WITH DAMASCUS DURING WEEKS OF PLANNING. EMBASSY HAS, OF COURSE, CONVEYED REGRET TO DAMASCUS, ALEPPO OFFICIALS. BELIEVE, HOWEVER, MORE CONCRETE GESTURE REQUIRED.

6. COULD DEPARTMENT SUPPORT ANOTHER CULTURAL PRESENTATION IN NEAR FUTURE? LIST OF PRIVATE PERFORMERS TOURING EUROPE THIS PERIOD SHOWS SOME POSSIBILITIES, INCLUDING EDWIN HAWKINS SINGERS. USIS PREPARED ASSIST AS POSSIBLE, BUT HAS BUDGET CONSTRAINTS.

7. RECOGNIZE CU/ARTS IN TIGHT BUDGET PERIOD, BUT BELIEVE THIS GESTURE IMPORTANT TO RELATIONS ACROSS THE BOARD. MURPHY

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